



Audubon | NEBRASKA

2021 Winter Newsletter



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Bird-Friendly
Communities

Who We Are

Audubon Nebraska operates statewide from an office in Omaha and through two nature centers and wildlife sanctuaries, Spring Creek Prairie Audubon Center and Iain Nicolson Audubon Center at Rowe Sanctuary, to protect birds and the places they need, today and tomorrow.



Director's Corner

by Kristal Stoner

The winter chill is in the air, and I find myself envious of how easily my summer bird friends take wing and head south for the winter. Perhaps more this year than in previous years. But not all our feathered friends fear the cold, and their resilience gives me inspiration.

Among our many winter birds, Blue Jays are a delight to behold with their bright blue feathers amid the dull winter foliage. These intelligent birds can get a bad reputation for being a bully at feeders, but they can remember where they cached a thousand acorns months before. Blue Jays are well known for their loud, raucous calls, but if you listen

they also mimic hawks. Perhaps mimicking a threat serves as a warning to fellow jays in the area. They can also mimic car alarms, perhaps for entertainment? They are amazingly adaptable and sometimes even choose to skip migration. Researchers have found that individual blue jays may migrate south one year, but stick around home the next. No one really understands what drives their decision making. Perhaps there are abundant resources for the winter, so why use all that energy flying thousands of miles? Perhaps they know the winter storms won't be that severe. Perhaps they saw some of their friends sneeze, and decided to stay socially distant in the colder weather rather than join a beach party.

We have all learned a few new tricks over the past year, and while we can't all mimic a car alarm many of our new skills and adaptations will serve us well into the future. While we stayed close to home, we formed new relationships and found new ways to communicate that will forever change us. And got to know the Blue Jays that chose to say just a little bit better.

Faces of Audubon

● State Office ● Spring Creek Prairie ● Rowe Sanctuary



Kristal Stoner - Executive Director

Kristal oversees Audubon Nebraska, with two centers as hubs of activity for statewide strategic bird conservation. She lays the groundwork to address new conservation challenges including drought, habitat loss and climate change.



Allison Christenson - Communications Coordinator

Allison handles all communications-related duties for Audubon Nebraska while assisting the two Audubon centers.



Meghan Sittler - Director

Meghan oversees the care and management of SCPAC. She has a close connection to the prairie; her parents farmed land near SCPAC where her sister and brother-in-law now farm.



Amy Plettner - Caretaker

Amy has been with SCPAC for 12 years as caretaker and outdoor educator. Her poetry has been published in a variety of anthologies and journals.



Jason "the Birdnerd" St. Sauver - Director of Education and Outreach

Jason oversees the planning and delivery of all education programs for the two centers, working with staff to provide quality nature experiences for all.



Kevin Poague - Operations Manager

Kevin has been the operations manager for SCPAC since 1998. He assists with education programs and helps conduct prairie bird surveys during breeding season.



Andrea Bornemeier - Educator

Andrea helps coordinate and facilitate school and youth programs and assists with community outreach programs.



Ed Hubbs - Habitat Program Manager

Ed manages the habitat at SCPAC, working closely with volunteers and local resource professionals.



Cacey Wilken - Conservation Field Technician

Cacey assists with GIS, habitat restoration, and management activities on the tallgrass prairie and riverine ecosystems for the benefit of bird conservation.



Victoria Lyons - Development Associate

Victoria assists in securing donations to support our work across the state, working closely with both centers and our statewide program leadership.



Melissa Mosier - Platte River Program Manager

Melissa works to organize and expand conservation efforts throughout the Platte River watershed in Nebraska, Colorado, and Wyoming.



Bill Taddicken - Director

Bill leads and oversees all Rowe Sanctuary programs and has worked extensively on conservation of the Platte River for Sandhill Cranes, Whooping Cranes, and other wildlife.



Rebekah Yates - Education Manager

Beka oversees all education programming at Rowe including school, adult, and family programs and summer camps.



Cody Wagner - Conservation Program Manager

Cody maintains the habitat programs at Rowe Sanctuary. He has previous experience from the US Fish and Wildlife Service refuge system, and the Nebraska Game and Parks Commission.



Soncey Kondrotis - Office Manager

Soncey oversees day-to-day management of Rowe Sanctuary.



Anne Winkel - Crane Festival Coordinator and Outreach Assistant

Anne is the coordinator for Audubon Nebraska's Crane Festival and assists with community relations.



Amanda Hegg - Conservation Program Associate

Amanda helps maintain habitat and implements various science and conservation initiatives at Rowe Sanctuary.



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Community Science Moved Ahead Safely

by Jason St. Sauver

With all the challenges and safety concerns of COVID-19, engaging volunteers and the public has been extremely difficult. Two of Audubon's most important community science projects – the Christmas Bird Count and the Great Backyard Bird Count – looked a little different this winter, but thought-out and careful changes allowed the events to continue safely.

The Christmas Bird Count (CBC) is the longest running community science project around, completing its 121st season on January 5, 2021. The data from this volunteer-led project has helped Audubon understand many of our bird species, from rare to common, and specifically led the science behind Audubon's *Survival By Degrees* report on the effects of climate change on birds across North America. In previous years, the CBC was a time for birders to meet up and count together, share sightings, and end a fun day of birding with a social event to tally up all species seen. This year, that was not the case. Audubon supported CBC circles across the country if they chose

to count, but all counters had to count solo or only with others from their own family. This meant no carpools, team counting, or end-of-count social events. These changes made some count circles difficult to get completed. For example, our partners at the Audubon Society of Omaha cancelled their CBC this year. But, others were able to find enough solo counters to get out to areas safely.

The Great Backyard Bird Count (GBBC) is a popular event for families and kids all across the country – fast, fun, and easy. Held annually over the President's Day weekend (Feb. 12-15 in 2021), participants are asked to watch birds at their feeders, in their backyards, or anywhere close to their home – for just 15 minutes. That's it! You can watch longer and each day, but at least 15 minutes and then enter what birds you saw through the online portal...and you're done. And currently, as this partnership project between Audubon, Birds Canada, and The Cornell Lab of Ornithology already has limited outside and travel needs, it was



able to move forward safely with little to no changes during the COVID-19 pandemic.

Watch for fun activities and programs themed around these community science projects in the new year from both our centers. They will help you and your family learn more about birds and participate in fun, interactive ways.

A Sincere Thank You to All

We know that nearly everyone's lives have been drastically changed over the past year and we cannot express how grateful we are to all of you for continuing to support us and our work for birds. In an everchanging world, the dedication we all have to protecting birds and the places they need never waivered.

From all of us at Audubon, thank you.





Tribal Partnership Programming Continues Refocused

by Jason St. Sauver

In 2019, Audubon Nebraska was thrilled to receive funding from the Claire M. Hubbard Foundation to work on building tribal relationships in Nebraska around work on native plants. We hired a cultural consultant, Renee Sans Souci (pictured), and had many early meetings with Tribal Council members from the Winnebago, Ponca, and Omaha Tribes of Nebraska. Then, in March, COVID-19 put a hard stop to all our progress. Native plantings were cancelled. Project scoping meetings were put off. Our education team was disappointed and disheartened as were our partners.

We decided to refocus the efforts, for now, on educational materials and programming until a future time when group gatherings and plantings could again be achieved safely. One of the projects that came out of this refocusing was the creation of two educational brochures on native plants and birds of the Winnebago area. This was completed in collaboration with the HoChunk Renaissance Program and incorporated both HoChunk words for the native plants and birds as well as the English names. Copies of these were given to the Winnebago Tribal Council, Little Priest Tribal College Extension, and the language Renaissance Program for community use. The second way the work was refocused was to utilize San Souci's talents and knowledge of native science and skills as an educator for three public programs with our Centers. Renee provided native science on stars at the Stars over Spring Creek Prairie event, told native tales of the coyote at the socially-distanced Hoot 'n' Howl Fest, and created video clips on native owl knowledge for Rowe Sanctuary's virtual Owl Prowl. Audubon Nebraska hopes to continue our work with Sans Souci and our tribal partners in Nebraska in the future when it is safe again to visit in person.



The Policy Wins of 2020

by Kristal Stoner

In a remote world, we saw several promising pieces of policy be introduced and be adopted.

Nebraska's working lands are often associated with feeding the world, but our rangelands will be a critical part of keeping the world cool. The Growing Climate Solutions Act, introduced in 2020 and supported by Congressman Bacon, Congressman Fortenberry and Senator Fischer, could potentially pull billions of tons of greenhouse gases like carbon dioxide out of the air each year and store it in soil and biomass. It's a good fit for Nebraska where natural climate solutions like cover cropping and prescribed grazing help solve the climate puzzle.

The Great American Outdoors Act passed last year provides permanent, mandatory funding for the Land and Water Conservation Fund at the authorized amount of \$900 million annually at no additional cost to taxpayers. The program will help national parks, local parks, public lands, and athletic fields in every county across the country. The passage of this legislation was years in the making, and we appreciate the dedication to stewarding our national and state parks.

Locally, the Lincoln Electric System (LES) deserves applause for their thoughtful input process and commitment to a 100% net decarbonization goal by 2040. Early in the process, Audubon provided technical expertise to LES staff regarding scenario modeling known as WIS:dom modeling that demonstrated how a variety of strategies could achieve carbon emission reduction. We also applaud Wachiska Audubon for their participation in the public input process to elevate possibilities and our concerns.



Audubon

Spring Creek Prairie Audubon Center



Prescribed Burning Together

If you have spent time at Spring Creek Prairie Audubon Center (SCPAC) in the late spring during the last 20 years, you have likely noticed a pattern in our land management practices. That pattern being the use of prescribed burns to set back or eradicate non-native plant species.

SCPAC is not alone in its need to conduct prescribed burns. Landowners across the world are learning the importance and necessity of fire on the landscape.

That brings up the question if an individual landowner can safely conduct a prescribed burn without the trained staff and volunteers who conduct burns at SCPAC. The answer is simple, they can!

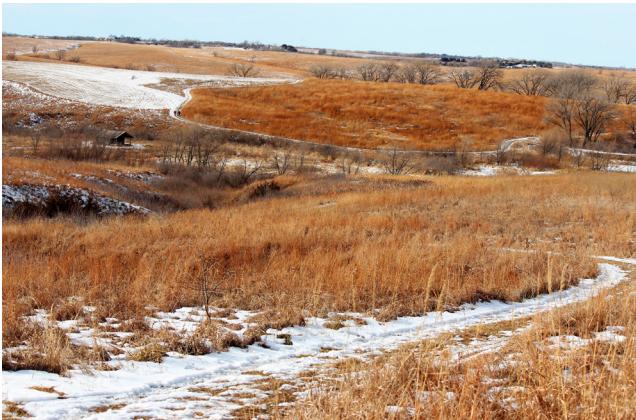


The Tri-County Prescribed Burn Association (TCPBA) is a local volunteer group that had its first burn season in 2010. This group of landowners and volunteers came together with the goal of helping each other safely implement prescribed burns by sharing knowledge, equipment, and manpower. Since inception the group has helped burn over 5,000 acres in southeastern Nebraska.

The majority of burns take place in the spring; TCPBA is already preparing for a busy 2021 spring burn season. Working with landowners TCPBA can help in all steps of the process, from helping write a legal burn plan to giving advice on how to prepare the area for burning. They even have a network of volunteers that are willing to come help on burns.

If this sounds like a lot of work...well it is. Thankfully a growing partnership with Audubon Nebraska and partial funding provided by the Nebraska Environmental Trust has allowed for the conservation team at SCPAC to expand its staff and assist local landowners in implementing conservation practices on their land (see previous editions of this newsletter welcoming Cacey Wilken to the team).

If you need help in conducting a prescribed burn, or are curious how your property could benefit from a prescribed fire, please contact SCPAC Habitat Manager Ed Hubbs.



The Volunteer Trail Stewards Program

Watch out for volunteers stalking the trails at Spring Creek Prairie! A green SCPAC hat or silver name badge could be identifying features. Actually, they are Trail Stewards, harmless and quite helpful.

Over the course of the last year, SCPAC saw a marked increase in trail use. The Trail Stewards program was developed to help staff stay aware of trail and resource conditions and increase our ability to educate visitors during their time at the prairie. This is especially important now with the center building operating with

reduced, temporary hours and fewer staff at the prairie.

Volunteer Trail Stewards are asked to commit to two (or more) hikes per month, interact with visitors and report on trail conditions, numbers of visitors, conversations with visitors, and any issues with the trails or visitors. This program will increase the public's access to and understanding of the site's resources, as well as extend our ability to educate and interpret the importance of the tallgrass prairie ecosystem and the birds and other animals that rely on it.

So if you encounter a Trail Steward while on a hike at Spring Creek Prairie, don't feed it! But do stop for a chat about what you have seen and what drew you to the prairie. And if you are interested in becoming a Trail Steward or in any other volunteer opportunities at Spring Creek Prairie, contact the volunteer coordinator, Andrea Bornemeier.



Spring Creek Prairie's New Online Store

Spring Creek Prairie has a new online gift store where a variety of items can be purchased from the comfort and safety of home. There are shirts with the SCPAC logo, hats, books, and kids' items. There will be a small shipping fee with each order, but this fee will be removed if items are picked up at the prairie. Call ahead and we can deliver them to your vehicle while you wait in our parking lot.

See our website and social media for the store link. All proceeds support our education and conservation efforts in tallgrass prairie management.



Update on the Trail Construction

Construction on Spring Creek Prairie's limestone trails is now complete. Work now moves to reseeding of disturbed areas. Please check our website and social media for updates. We are excited to have this project nearing completion to improve accessibility of the prairie to all our visitors and open a new portion of the prairie to trail use as we complete a segment of the Prairie Corridor Trail!



Audubon

Iain Nicolson
Audubon Center
at Rowe Sanctuary



What to Expect from the 2021 Crane Season at Rowe

Crane season will be a bit different at Rowe this year due to safety measures for COVID-19. Though we wish we could have all supporters visit like previous years, we know keeping our staff, volunteers and visitors safe is of the upmost importance.

We decided to cut in-person programming including the indoor crane viewing, photography experiences, speaker series, school field trips and family viewing nights. We will be operating the General Crane Viewing Experience and the Overnight Photo Experience which now allows the use of tripods.



The capacity in the blinds is being reduced to 10 people to allow for social distancing. This will permit people to use tripods, but not as many people will be able to see the cranes from our river blinds. We will also be limiting the number of tours per day due to a shortage in volunteers and staff time.



Another big change for this season is the closing of our visitors' center from March 1 to April 15. Also, the West trail will have limited hours of 10 am to 2 pm. We will still be able to process gift store purchases and deliver them to you before or after your tour, just order online at store.rowesanctuary.org.

Reservations for our General Crane Viewing Experience and Overnight Photo Experience will be delayed until 9 am CT on Wednesday, February 17. All tours are subject to cancellation on short notice. Fees will be fully refunded any time it is necessary to close for safety (this could mean less than a 24-hour notice of cancellation).

All guests will be **required to wear a mask** while on Audubon property both inside and outside, including on all tours. Dark colored masks are required for viewing blinds.

We will not be doing the indoor orientation before each tour, but we will have online materials for participants to review. The precise arrival time will be shared upon confirmation of the reservation. All participants will be required to provide contact information in accordance with our local health department guidelines (for contact tracing reasons) and sign a COVID-19 liability waiver.

All crane season programming is subject to change so please stay updated through rowe.audubon.org/crane-viewing, follow us on social media, and/or sign up for our eNews.

If you're unable to join us in-person for crane season, join virtually through our Crane Cam on Explore.org. It's a live feed of the river that operates year-round! Plus, stay tuned for additional virtual experiences during America's Greatest Migration.



A New Study: Can UV-A Lights Mitigate Crane Power Line Collisions?

A new study is being conducted at Audubon's Rowe Sanctuary with hopes of reducing the number of Sandhill Crane and Whooping Crane collisions with power lines.



Although power lines on the sanctuary have been fitted with glow-in-the-dark line markers to increase their visibility, collisions still persist because most occur nocturnally when line markers are least visible.

Amanda Hegg, Rowe Sanctuary's conservation program associate, explained how fascinating this project is because "it involves new partnerships and technology that takes advantage of a unique adaptation of birds: the ability to see ultraviolet light. One of our partners in the project, EDM International Inc., engineered a solar-powered, near-ultraviolet light called an Avian Collision Avoidance System (ACAS) that will be mounted on two powerlines at Rowe Sanctuary."

In January of this year, the ACASs were installed on two power lines crossing the Platte River on the sanctuary. These power lines are 258 meters in length and are responsible for thousands of avian deaths over the years. If effective, these installations could be an affordable, long-term solution to the persistent mid-flight collisions problem.

"Scientists from Crane Trust have been instrumental in the design and implementation of the study," said Hegg. "We are grateful for their help and for everyone who has dedicated time and effort to this important project."

To learn more about this study, visit rowe.audubon.org or email rowesanctuary@audubon.org.



Rowe's Upgraded Online Store

Rowe Sanctuary's new online store will allow people from all over the United States to order crane-related items and gifts shipped to their home. However, a new feature has been added into the check-out function which allows people to pick up their order from the visitors' center parking lot. This new function will allow staff to accommodate orders this coming crane season.

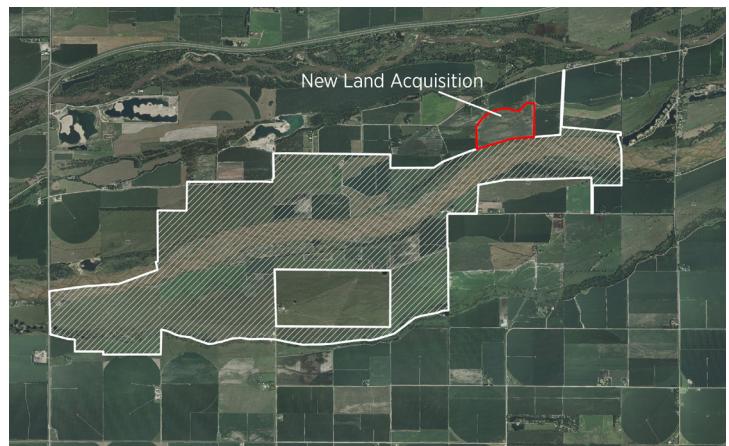
Now, no matter what this spring looks like, visitors from all over can take a piece of this great migration home with them to remember forever. Browse the new store at store.rowesanctuary.org and find fun, crane-tastic gifts for you and that special someone.



The Sanctuary Expands

In late 2020, Rowe Sanctuary purchased an additional 84 acres that are adjacent to Rowe's existing property. This tract will add to protections on the north side of the channel directly across from one of the prime crane viewing locations. This purchase was made possible by the generous donations of the Caruthers Family Foundation to support land protection for cranes near Rowe Sanctuary.

The property is currently being used for row crop production and the plan is to convert it to grassland/wet meadow habitat in the near future. Grasslands important for cranes and other birds are in short supply in the Platte Valley. This restoration will add to the resilience of the land for cranes, grassland birds, and more. Audubon is thankful for the Caruthers Family Foundation for caring enough about our natural treasures to increase protections for land on Rowe Sanctuary.



As always, to be an integral part of the local community, Audubon will pay property taxes on this new land. These taxes support our schools, which are important partners in creating a culture of conservation to create a future for America's Greatest Migration.

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How You Can Help

Make a Cash or Online Donation

Money orders or checks can be mailed to centers directly or you can donate online.

Sign up for Audubon Nebraska's eNews

By signing up for our eNews, you will receive Audubon Nebraska and center updates plus so much more!

Volunteer

Call or email either center for information on volunteering.

Contribute to Science

Audubon offers opportunities to get involved in community science projects. Read more at audubon.org/science.

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Nebraska Bird Line (402) 721-5487

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Wildcat Audubon Society

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www.wyoneb.net/-delara/WildcatAudubon

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Front Cover

Cedar Waxwing. Photo: Michael Mayda/Audubon Photography Awards

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Red-bellied Woodpecker. Photo: Matthew Pimm/Audubon Photography Awards

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American Goldfinch. Photo: Matt and Rebecca Horn/Great Backyard Bird Count

Bald Eagle. Photo: Larry Venus/Audubon Photography Awards

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Coyote Tales with Renee Sans Souci. Photo: Jason St. Sauver/Audubon

Sandhill Crane. Photo: Beth Huning/Audubon Photography Awards

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Horned Lark. Photo: Evan Barrientos/Audubon

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Winter Prairie. Photo: Lynn Ayers/Spring Creek Prairie Trail Steward

Coyote. Photo: Mike Ford/Spring Creek Prairie Trail Steward

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Sandhill Crane. Photo: Diana Douglass/Audubon Photography Awards

Sandhill Crane. Photo: Don Brockmeier

Rowe Sanctuary. Photo: Cody Wagner/Audubon

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Sandhill Crane. Photo: Don Brockmeier

Back Cover

Mourning Dove. Photo: Peter Griffith/Audubon Photography Awards

